

CHAPTER FIVE

THE WOOL-BUYERS

France and the French have played a central role in that most Australian of activities, the wool industry. ^{THE TRADE} ^{of international wool trade} ^{was quickly envisaged in 1810s} ^{by wool traders} ^{established here from 1810s} ^{Even more fundamental contribution} The French national stud was founded in 1773 at Rambouillet national park, some 60 kilometres south-west of Paris, with Merino sheep imported from Spain. It constituted one of the half dozen sources of Australia's original Merino flock, and a Rambouillet ram named "Emperor", bred by the Peppin brothers near Deniliquin in New South Wales, ^{in 1840s} is still considered the outstanding sire in the history of the Australian wool industry.

to the development of the wool breed.

So it came about that French sheep preceded French wool traders to these shores by about a quarter of a century.

WOOL TRADE

It would be inconceivable to write a book on the French in Australia without devoting some space to the wool trade in which they played an essential role. However, in a country which is supposed "to ride on the sheep's back", it came as a great surprise to discover that ^{almost nothing} ~~no book~~ has ever been published on the wool trade,* as distinct from wool production.

Said David Knight, director of the Australian Council of Wool Exporters, Southern Region: "History just passed us by". His sad comment referred to the fact that while wool remains one of Australia's main productions, the trade, as it existed until around 1970, has become a thing of the past.

It therefore appears ^{ed)} necessary to describe not only French wool traders but the wool trade in general, and what it once entailed. Because of the lack of previous research, much of the following data had to be obtained from personal interviews.

* The nearest is probably Jack Allerdingle's "Wool: A case for optimism" (1967), which describes the basis for measurements quite well but which does not deal with the life and work

In terms of the number of people involved, the French wool trade in Australia was never a big affair: a maximum of twenty wool-buying firms at any one time since the 1880s, each employing one to two specialists brought over from France. Even taking into account ^{the} higher than average number of children in such families, the French wool-buying community never exceeded some 300 people.

Yet the community was to become a distinctive feature of Australian social history and earn a place on the economic scene far beyond its numerical strength. The best evidence of this, perhaps, is the concern displayed by the New South Wales government upon learning of the death in France in 1918 of Geogre Playoust, a distinguished wool-buyer, and one of the first established in this country. Premier William Holman wrote to the brother of the deceased:

"The Members of the Government join me in a most sincere expression of condolence ... it must be some measure of consolation to know that he has lived a life of great usefulness to his country, has been of inestimable service to the Wool trade of this state ... appreciation of the irreparable loss which has been suffered by the French community in Australia ..."

But what did these "wool-buyers" do that made them so important?

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After shearing, the wool clip was dried, packed in bales of around 90 kilogrammes, segregated into pure merino, comeback and crossbred. The "comeback" was the in-between quality, applied to breeds such as Polwarth that are "coming back" to Merino. The bales were then sent by the sheep owners, also known as "graziers" to large wool stores in capital cities as well as in country centres such as Albury, Portland, Toowoomba, Geelong, Goulburn, Launceston and Newcastle.

In the stores, owned and run either by graziers' cooperatives or by large companies such as Elder Smith, Goldsborough Mort or Dalgety's - whose job was also to prepare lists of available lots - the bales sat on display for the attention of the professional wool-buyers. They would finger and feel each clip before bidding for the bales at auction.

While a small proportion of the wool was purchased by Australian mills, the majority went to overseas buyers. Through much of the nineteenth century, the United Kingdom was both the major purchaser and the intermediary between Australia and the woollen mills of the European mainland.

In France, where the textile industry is as old and as well-established as in Britain, the major mills were located in the Lille-Roubaix-Tourcoing area of northern France. Today, when travelling from the centre of Lille towards Belgium, the impression is that the three cities have merged into one giant sprawl that seems to extend beyond the border. By the 1960s, Tourcoing ~~already~~ had grown into a city of some 150,000 people, 80 per cent of whom lived on direct income from the wool industry. The city has since declined.

Spinning machines were set up in Tourcoing in the middle of the nineteenth century especially to handle Australian fibres. But with the rapid expansion of the market during those times of increasing wealth between 1850 and 1890, dependence on British merchants as middlemen inevitably was called into question. The major stumbling block to direct trade between the two countries was finance and banking operations, a problem solved in 1881 when the French bank Comptoir National d'Escompte (now the Banque Nationale de Paris) opened a branch in Sydney, operating as an Australian bank.

2 LEARNING THE TRADE

From the late 1880s, when French financial institutions were in place, the Wool Industry of France was ready to dispense with U.K. intermediaries, but still had to train its own buyers and send them overseas.

The training of a professional wool-buyer took several years and wound up with diplomas issued by special Industry Schools. These gave tuition essentially in the techniques of wool sorting and the art of deduction through sampling, with training both in the classroom and at the point of arrival of the wool in France. Apart from learning specialist techniques in fibre know-how, trainees attended a broad range of classes on the country of destination which included:

- business management and business law in the (say) Australian context;
- Book-keeping and practice necessary for wool auctions and for costing;
- languages - English for would-be Australian residents, Spanish for future wool-buyers in Argentina;
- other background, in particular the history and social mores of the prospective ^{supplier} country.

Prospective French wool-buyers, it seems, were prepared more thoroughly for their stay and career in Australia than diplomats and other businessmen en route for a posting overseas. There was a great difference in scope, however. A term of foreign duty for a diplomat or businessman was generally limited to two to three years, rarely more than five. Wool-buyers on the other hand were expected to remain expatriated for at least a decade, and many in fact stayed on permanently.

When, for example, Emile Gaillet left France for Australia in 1924, he promised his relatives ^{at home}, that he would return by 1934. But he was still absent forty years later, and it was only due to health problems in the family that he returned, aged 61, and retired in his native land. Now 84, the former wool-buyer sounds almost apologetic for having returned to a country he obviously no longer saw as home. Occasional visits from former Melbourne acquaintances appear to be the high spots of his life, along with weekly free English classes to a group of six to eight young students, which apparently provide a bridge between his two worlds.

WOOL AUCTIONS

With the exception of about six weeks in July-August, wool-buyers such as Gaillet, irrespective of their nationality, went through the same motions and the same routine year in year out.

From their overseas companies, the buyers received cabled orders written in code in order to keep the price limits they set on the bidding secret from their competitors. Some firms specialised in merino wool, others in coarser type wool, with some of the wool purchased for resale, some for part processing, and the rest to be entirely treated and spun by the company that did the buying in Australia.

With his orders in hand, the buyer would trek aisle by aisle through the large stores, touching and feeling the merchandise on display, generally sampling one bale out of five. This essential phase, often described by the buyers as "fingering", was aimed at appreciating and noting the colour, the thickness and the nature of the wool. A long and thorough experience, usually begun at the school mentioned earlier, was a ^{paramount} ingredient for success.

During this six-hour daily routine, the buyer converted his tactile and visual impressions into monetary values, attempting to match his orders against the lots on offer, noting his own price estimates and top limits on the catalogue - all of this naturally in code to avoid indiscreet glances.

The next phase was the wool auctions, which took place some 200 days of each year. The pace of bidding was extremely fast, with up to 550 lots offered in an hour, calling for a fair amount of practice and skill from the bidders. Up to 50 or 60 of them took part in the major sessions, and the calendar of auction sales was established so as to allow buyers to move from one town to another. Indeed, the occupation required a good amount of travel... and early rising.

Bidding was effected in pence per pound (lbs), and even farthings were used, farthings being equivalent to a quarter of a penny, with 240 pence in one Pound, for those who have forgotten.

In spite of the keen competition and of the need for split-second decisions, former French wool-buyers interviewed all said there was a great deal of camaraderie in the wool-buying community. There was also a great deal of money to be made, but no one was willing to disclose particulars on income, whether cash or "perks". Given the lack of official records available, we can only assume that income levels among wool-buyers were as secret as their coded order books. And those interviewed all agreed that the financial rewards made the job worthwhile and was the main reason for buyers not only remaining in Australia, but, wherever possible, training their children in the same career.

During most of the first hundred years of wool trading, the United Kingdom was the leading buyer, followed by France in second place. Some years France was actually on top, and it was only in the late 1950s that Japan surpassed France and later the U.K. *

* The following information is from G. Chislett: An Investigation into Wool ... : in 1958, France was the second largest buyer of Australian wool, with 250 million lbs, slightly behind the United Kingdom with 273 million and ahead of Japan with 229 million. The average price at the time was 62 pence per lb, making the value of France's annual purchases around 65 million pounds (in money), probably the equivalent of some 800 million dollars current value.

Until about 1970, wool auctions were a major news item on radio and in the press. Yet France, despite its place as a leading purchaser, was never mentioned. After quoting the rates, a typical statement from the announcer would be: "... the main buyers were the United Kingdom, the Continent, with some support from Japan and the United States". Importers of French goods felt most frustrated in that the U.S.A., which bought about a fifth as much as France, would be mentioned at least fifty times in the year, and France not even once, meaning the public at large was given no incentive to buy French goods on commercial grounds.

The Roubaix-Tourcoing area was the main but not the only outlet for the French wool trade. In the same way that France had had to rely at first on British wool buyers for supplies, the French once established were requested to meet demand in other countries. According to some buyers interviewed, the Japanese first penetrated the market via French firms, and only later provided training for their own staff. Germany and Poland, at various stages, were also important customers of French firms.

THE WOOL BUYERS - WHO WERE THEY?

According to some sources, the first French wool-buyer was Auguste Dalle, of the Henri Cauilliez firm, who arrived around 1886. He was followed two or three years later by George Playoust, mentioned above, who worked for the same firm and who was to become the founder of the first and most-respected French wool-buying "dynasty" in Australia. One of his grand-daughters, Jacqueline Dwyer of Mosman, who ^{steel} speaks very good French, supplied us with this account of his life:

"He started in Melbourne, but subsequently moved to Sydney where he founded his own firm as a wool-buyer. His brother Joseph also came to Sydney and settled in Strathfield. He continued to work for Cauilliez.

"George and Marie-Thérèse (Playoust) had 10 children whom they frequently took back to France for business trips, though their children's education was largely Australian. George seems to have been in America at the time of mobilization in 1914, on his way back to Australia. By the time he arrived back in Sydney, his son Jacques (Jacqueline Dwyer's father) had already left for France to join the colours. Other sons followed, then the parents decided that their place was in Paris where they could see their sons on leave. They were both active in Paris in the French-Australian League. Their son Stephane was killed in Champagne in 1917. Another son, Marcel, died in 1916, a son-in-law Alfred Decouvelaere in 1915. René came back from the war seriously ill and died in 1922. A son, Jean, of the Joseph Playoust's of Strathfield, was also killed. Jacques survived the Somme, Verdun typhoid, a shipwreck, and came back to Australia after the war with a French bride. (still about Jacques, Jacqueline's father): An Australian in the French army was something of a curiosity, and like myself he had a strong feeling for both countries."

Grand-father George, as said earlier, died in France but not of war wounds. His life, like other wool-buyers after him, testifies to the early existence here, among the French wool trade families, of a truly bi-lingual, bi-cultural society. While their culture, language, and eating habits remained decidedly French, they were completely fluent in English. And they all took an active and often leading role in French societies concerned to promote trade, such as the Chamber of Commerce which Playoust presided for many years, to promote welfare, such as the Bureau de Bienfaisance and Société d'Entraide, or to promote education, such as the Alliance Française. This indeed was more a part of Australian than of French culture as the habit of joining clubs or societies is less ingrained in France than in Australia.

Back home in France, they saw themselves as Australians, joining French-Australian clubs for example. The life of the Playoust family also reveals the immense death toll of the "Great War", and the apparently high proportion of victims among the family was typical of the numbers lost in the average French home.

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Apart from the Playoust family already mentioned, we had hoped to list all les lainiers and delve deep into their individual histories, but this proved beyond the scope of this book. An additional problem was attempting to differentiate the "firms" based in France from the "buyers" in Australia, as many of the employees despatched from France later resigned to run their own businesses, leaving an intricate web of relations difficult to unravel. The French Chamber of Commerce in Sydney, meanwhile, said their interest was limited to importers of French goods and did not extend to exports to the country. But in Melbourne, the minutes of the Victorian Wool Growers Association, which began in 1891 and continued for only a few years thereafter, showed that French buyers outnumbered all others in late 1891. The firms, or individuals, established in the early years and which remained in existence ^{until recently} include Dewez, Playoust, Wenz, Masurel, Dassonville, Segard and Prevost.

To the average French migrant who arrived this century, and especially prior to 1965, les lainiers enjoyed the prestige of success. Sometimes viewed as a self-appointed upper class, disinclined to mix with the more lowly, they were nevertheless a jolly group of free-spenders and often lavish-livers. A number of them joined the Alliance Francaise, perhaps to give themselves a cultural stature they did not necessarily possess.

But interviews of third and fourth generation descendents of French wool-buyers, as well as more recent arrivals to the trade, revealed they in fact had a culture of their own, built up over the past one hundred years. Many, for example, sent their children to France for part of their schooling. They in turn generally returned to Australia where they married, often into other French lainier families and, when the trade failed to feed them all, took up jobs like any other Australian man or woman. French-English bilingualism, however, continued on for several generations unlike ^{many} other French migrants, who until the "ethnic" fashion ^{of} the 1970s and 1980s failed to teach their children French.

After the demise of the wool trade around 1970, some of the more recently-arrived wool-buying families returned to France only to find they were unable to readapt to the French way of life. While admitting that Australian customs had been hard to take initially, they said the readjustment to life in France had proved even tougher after the passing of time.

Such for instance was the experience of Andre Salembier, who with his wife Suzanne and their six children - three Australian-born and three French-born - returned to their home town of Tourcoing when their firm folded. Four years later, they were back in Australia and none of the eight has left the country since, except for a holiday. The children have grown up and each has found a companion, or spouse, only ^{one} of whom is also French. The oldest, Bernard, won a "Best Apprentice of the Year" award some years ago and is now district service manager of a motor car company. The second son also won an award, in cooking, and works as a chef. One daughter is raising a family in a country town, the

other has become a strapper with a horse trainer, a job very few women have taken but amongst whom are several of French extraction. Another son is an executive with a French-Australian electronics firm while the youngest of the six is learning the car servicing trade like his older brother.

The Salembier family was chosen at random, one of many, as fairly typical in its manner of blending into Australian society. Had wool trade activity continued as before, the preservation of a French cultural identity would probably have continued through further generations. We believe the French wool traders in Australia a fairly closed community, preserved their cultural identity because of their economic strength in Australian society.

THE WOOL INDUSTRY TODAY AND TOMORROW

What happened after 1970 that led to such great social upheaval in the world of the wool-buyers? Firstly, dramatic change in the wool-buying countries themselves. The European textile industry in particular has seen huge cutbacks over the last two to three decades, with many companies winding up operations voluntarily and others declaring bankruptcy. Tourcoing, for example, has one of the highest unemployment rates in France. But the British textile industry has fared even worse than the French.

Australian mills now take up to 20 per cent of the country's raw wool produce, compared to only five per cent in 1955. Japan is our number one customer and has been so for a good many years. The Soviet Union is in second place, and France is still high up, in third place according to recent statistics, followed close behind by Italy. ^{China and} South Korea ^{ve} moved up ^{into} the six to eight top buyers, but the United Kingdom has slipped back to tenth place.

The second and most significant cause of the upheaval has been the change undergone in the wool-selling profession itself. The manual sampling and appreciation which called for great skill and

expertise now has been almost entirely replaced by what the Wool Bureau calls "objective measurement". The practice has become for wool-buyers to receive an auction catalogue where each lot is identified by a number of symbols which give the following information:

- district, i.e. geographical and climatic background;
- fleece (Merino, etc...);
- style/quality (e.g. Merino combing fleece has seven graded styles;
- percentage of vegetable matter;
- staple length, with staple strength and point of break. The catalogue indicates the amount of force required to break the staple related to the diameter of the staple. The POB (point of break) indicates further where the various percentages of break took place;
- further particulars on percentages of vegetable matter, such as burr (trefoil burr and associated sub-clovers), shive (a particularly difficult type to separate from wool) and hardheads (Ngurra burr, a nutlike seed easily separated from wool);
- clean yield (amount of processable wool after all the short fibre and vegetable matter has been removed) calculate on four different norms;
- gross weight;
- average fibre diameter. *

The colour has not yet been coded and a few characteristics may not as yet be measurable, so bins are still provided for the buyers to finger through samples. But this is only a fraction of the "subjective" appraisal carried out for over a century.

There are at present four remaining French wool-buying firms - Prouvost-Lefebvre, Compagnie d'Importation de Laines, Dewavrin Segard and Simptra Dewavrin. - carrying out the work once performed by some twenty companies. ^{As} most of their tasks, moreover, have become merely clerical, the skills of the past

* The information ^{on} Objective measurement was supplied by David Knight, Director, Australian Council of Wool Exporters, Southern Region.

may be dispensed with, although some ^{people} express differences of opinion on this point. Some of those we interviewed argued in favour of a resumption of professional training to replace the all but vanished experts in the field, whereas others felt new professionals would in their turn find themselves out of work due to the inevitable progress in the future of "objective measurement".

A LITTLE AUSTRALIA IN SOUTH WESTERN FRANCE

There is a small town located in the southern tip of France's Massif Central, between Toulouse and Beziers, that lives off the Australian sheep's back to a higher degree than any here. Some of its small streets are named "rue Brisbane", "rue Sydney", or "rue d'Australie", and along them stroll a fair number of former French residents of Australia!

It all began with the loss of sheepskins. Until around 1880, very little use had been found in Australia for the skins of dead sheep. Removing the wool was too costly to make it a paying proposition, so the hides, with the wool still attached, were simply thrown away.

This practice continued until the town of Mazamet appeared on the scene. Its inhabitants had discovered that their tiny river, l'Arnette, possessed a unique cleansing quality: when sheepskins were immersed in its waters, the wool was easily separated from the hide. It was on this basis that Mazamet established an industry which at times has handled up to 85 per cent of the world's sheepskins. In the past, the town boasted several wool-buyers in Australia, but now has only one. Guy Pascal, who was sent to Australia 30 years ago by the Mazamet company Rives, buys through direct negotiations (there are no sheepskin auctions) across the country and organises shipment to France. The business remains profitable for Mazamet although the town has lost its quasi-monopoly to firms from northern Spain, who have been taking an active interest in acquiring hides.

FOOTNOTE

Hereafter is a list of French woolbuying firms in the mid 1960s, on the eve of their progressive demise. The names of the principals are in brackets when different from the names of their firms. This list was compiled from personal recollection.

Etablissements BONTE & Co (E.J.BRAIL)
 HENRY CAULLIEZ (Auguste DALE in MELBOURNE) (Claude DAVRAIN)
 Victor DEKYVERE & Co
 A.DESBOUVRIES (Camille GHEYSSENS)
 DASSONVILLE & Co
 DEVILLE E.L. & H
 DEWAVRIN.A.SEGARD P/L [Commonly A.D.F.] (L.THEVENIN-R.MONIEZ -Andre & Jo FLIPO)
 DUVILLIERS R.
 D'HALLUIN & Co
 LAHOUSSE & Co (Jean LEGRAND in MELBOURNE)
 Societe Lainiere BOUZIN Freres
 Etablissements LEROUX-BRAME Fils (W & P.ROUSSEAU)
 MASUREL & DOSSIN (RENE DUPUCHE - JEAN DUTHOIT)
 MOCH & ODELIN (F.BOURGEOIS in SYDNEY) (Emile GAILLET and Andre CAU in MELBOURNE)
 MOTTE DELMASURE & CAULLIEZ (Paul DEKYVERE)
 COMPAGNIE D'IMPORTATION DE LAINES (Augustin NOPENAIRE-Pierre ROBIN-P.LAMBLIN)
 Etablissements Fernand POLLET (J.P. Fourlinnie)
 PREVOST & Cie
 PROUVOST LEFEBVRE (Jacques DEGRAVES in MELBOURNE)
 Emile SEGARD (Edouard DOUEZ ^{PERE ET FILS} and Pierre CORDIER in MELBOURNE) (CESAR ESTERMAN ^{in SYDNEY})
 Alphonse SIX S.A.R.L.- (Jean DESMARCHELIER-Hubert HOUFFLIN in SYDNEY)
 (Daniel BLOMME-Andre SALEMBIER in MELBOURNE)
 VORE^{ux}~~ux~~-CAU (Claude LIBE R in Melbourne)
 Andre TOULEMONDE WOOL Co Pty.Ltd [Commonly A.T.F.] (B.CATRICE in MELBOURNE)
 TRENTESEAUX-DESTOMBES P/L (Cl.TRANET in MELBOURNE) (R.DUTRIEZ in SYDNEY)
 VANLAINE Pty.Ltd
 WALLAN & Co
 WATTINE -BOSSUT
 Henri WATTINE (Jean CORNARD in MELBOURNE)
 Societe WENZ & Co

FOUR
CHAPTER SIXAUSTRALIA'S ~~ONLY~~ FRENCH VILLAGE

Until recently, the founding and christening of Hunters Hill, one of Sydney's more pleasant and affluent suburbs, was attributed to Scotsman Thomas Muir.

Born in the 1760s into a law practising family, Thomas Muir enrolled as a law student at Glasgow university, but was promptly expelled later on when he became one of the leaders of a movement claiming the rights of students to elect their rectors. He went to live in Paris in 1789 where he befriended the leading revolutionaries of the day.

Muir returned to Scotland a man with a mission and began agitating for parliament^{ary} reforms. A follower of Thomas Paine, he was arrested, tried and found guilty of sedition. Transported to Port Jackson in 1794, he was able to buy not only relative freedom but also a small farm house that he named Huntersville after his father's property in Glasgow. In 1796, he escaped from the penal colony and travelled to France, where he died in 1798.

Muir's farm was of course confiscated, but its name was given to the area - or so it was believed for some time. Isadore Brodsky, in his book "Hunters Hill 1861-1961", discloses that the earliest reference to the name "Hunters Hill" in the area predates Thomas Muir's arrival by 22 days. But in view of the early links between French, British and Australian political reformers, it seemed appropriate to retell the tale.

Once a bushy peninsula upstream of Sydney on the Paramatta River, with an early reputation as a haunt for sly grog dealers and distillers (before the arrival of the French!), Hunters Hill has grown into a smart suburb in the Sydney metropolitan area.

Last century, travel to and from the peninsula was generally by boat. Now it is faster to reach by car, north along the Pacific Highway^v; west through Lane Cove until the heart of Hunters Hill, just over Fig Tree Bridge.

Construction of the Expressway across the middle of the peninsula has forced the destruction or removal of a few of the old homes of the French Village, as it once was called. But right and left of the elevated thoroughfare lie quiet and narrow streets that have kept much of their original character, and that make the suburb distinctly different ^{from} to any other in Australia. Street signs dotted throughout Hunters Hill bear witness to the French pioneers of the area: streets named De Milhaud, Joubert, Bonnefin, Passy, Jeanneret, D'Aram, Viret, Joly and Roche.

Of the many who left their mark, Jules Joubert really must have been a wandering spirit. Born in the Angoulême region of western France (the département called "Charente" but whose old provincial name is "Saintonge"), best known to Australians for the production of cognac, Jules sailed from Europe in 1839, aged only 16. After journeying around the world, especially around New Zealand and the Pacific, he decided to stay in Australia, following in the footsteps of his elder brother Didier, who had settled in Sydney in 1837, as a wine and spirits merchant. And it was the long peninsula upstream from the city that finally attracted Jules.

But the Joubert family were not in fact the first French settlers in Hunters Hill. That honour belongs to the Marist Fathers, in particular to Fathers Joly, Roche and Dubreuil, who had bought land there in 1847 and built "Villa Maria", which stands there to this day incorporated in a church and college complex. The Marist Fathers, a French Roman Catholic order, were later joined by the Marist Brothers, ^{also French} a ~~different~~ order, who established St Joseph's college, a quite large school built in 1881 that now stands in Gladesville Road and Mary Street.

The two Joubert brothers Didier and Jules, later joined by Gabriel de Milhaud, began to acquire land in the area, becoming the three "founding fathers" of modern Hunters Hill. Land was cheap in the previously ill-famed district, and their largest purchase was for 200 acres in the Fig Tree area bought from well-known and respected Sydney ^{builder} ~~dweller~~ Mary Reibey, who kept some of the land where the Jouberts built her a cottage.

The Joubert-Milhaud trio were essentially "spec-builders". Employing up to 70 workmen, mostly stonemasons from Italy along with a few French and German carpenters, they sold their houses upon completion.

The 1850s were the years of the great Hunters Hill building boom. By 1861, the peninsula boasted a population of 400 scattered in just over 100 homes, the majority of them built by the Jouberts, some of stone, others of stone and timber. Other master builders also came along, in particular Charles Jeanneret and Léonard Bordier, both of French origin, and even now builders such as Huntley and John Clarke keep to the quintessential French village style. While the buyers were rarely French, one of the most lavish homes erected was Passy, built for French ^{the} consul Louis de Sentis, mentioned in Chapter Two.

It was the design of the homes that was ^{typically} French, ^{as well as the} layout, and a strange older-world atmosphere ^{still pervades} the streets of Hunters Hill that lie off the new main thoroughfare.

By 1859, there were strong calls to establish local government, although records show petitions both against and in favour of such a move. However the ayes won the day, leading to the proclamation of the Municipality of Hunters Hill in January 1861.

Jules Joubert was elected Chairman in the first ballot, and Gabriel de Milhaud was to be the municipality's second Chairman in 1863.

The ferry service that came to link Hunters Hill with the Sydney metropolis was also a Joubert business from the start, and remained in the hands of Numa Joubert, the son of Didier, until 1906. Numa himself was elected mayor in 1888, followed by Charles Jeanneret in 1890.

During a search to find traces of the original Jouberts in their home country in and around Angoulême, in France, we met Monsieur Gabriel Delage at the Archives Départementales, also president of the Association Généalogique de la Charente and author of several books on families of the region. He confirmed that "Joubert" was a fairly common surname in that part of France, but efforts to track down descendants aware of any

"Australian connection" have so far proved fruitless. M. Delage however showed great interest in photographs of French-designed houses in Hunters Hill, and pointed out several features similar to Charente homes of the same period. He in fact sent us to the nearby town of Dignac, where most buildings date back to the 1850s (see illustrations).

The greatest similarities, we thought, were the stone walls and gates separating the gardens from the street. But the comparison is hampered by the vast difference in maintenance - or rather lack of it - in the old French town of Dignac. The town's Australian house-owner counterparts in Hunters Hill appear to have spared no effort or expense over the last hundred years to keep their homes looking as new as possible, an effort which is likely to have entailed changes of windows, roofs, doors and even balconies.

But given the number of Australian houses built far later than 1860 which now are dilapidated and unsuitable for habitation, the condition of the buildings on Hunters Hill are an achievement to the credit of their French and other master builders.

The architecturally-sumptuous Passy still stands on a fairly large block of land. Sans-Souci has become Merimbah and been divided into flats. Saintonge, named after the Joubert's home province, is perhaps the best reminder of the original style imported from France. Coorabel and 44 Mary Street highlight the contrast between the most elaborate and simpler of the Joubert designs. Fig Tree Chapel was removed from its original site plumb on the path of the new expressway to be rebuilt as St Mark's, an Anglican church surrounded by trees, with a plaque to its constructor Didier Joubert.

These are only a few of the at least 50-odd early buildings still standing today. In "Hunters Hill Sketchbook", with drawings of around 30 of the homes by Cedric Emmanuel, author Patricia Thompson writes:

"Alone among Sydney's older suburbs, Hunters Hill has never lost its tranquil, slightly snug nineteenth century air. [It has] something of the atmosphere of a French provincial town: settled, reclusive, standing apart".

The Joubert name has remained a part of the contemporary Australian scene. Joubert's British Motors in Melbourne for a long time were dealers for French car-makers Delage, Delahaye and Panhard. Joubert and Joubert, also in Melbourne but with offices nationwide, sells foam carpet underlays today, but was the importer and producer of chocolate-tasting baby food Phosphatine Fallières from 1921, when the trading company was set up by the family, until 1978.

The two branches of the Australian Joubert family have spread and multiplied yet maintain pride and interest in their French roots and ancestors, Jules and Didier. A family tree supplied by Peter Numa Joubert, professor of mechanical engineering at Melbourne University, shows that in each generation of Jules Joubert's descendants there is at least one Jules or Jules-Ernest. And on the Didier side, it appears almost mandatory for males to be christened Didier, or Numa, after Didier's son.

Each side of the family boasts at least one dedicated chronicler of its history, and says Peter Numa Joubert: "Many have made the pilgrimage to Château Chatellais near Meursac, Charente Maritime, which was the family home for generations, and to the Arc de Triomphe and Versailles to inspect the engraving and bust of General Joubert, one of Napoléon's famous generals".